

CIPD


*Championing better
work and working lives*

THE PEOPLE PROFESSION IN 2018

UK and Ireland

Report

November 2018



The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Report

The people profession in 2018: UK and Ireland

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Acknowledgements

This report was written by Louisa Baczor, Research Adviser at the CIPD. Special thanks go to our partners at the European Association for People Management (EAPM), the Institute for Human Resource Professionals (IHRP) in Singapore, and the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), for their support in designing the survey.

Thanks to Laura Piggott, Ian Neale and the team at YouGov for their help with the survey design, data collection and analysis.

I'd also like to thank CIPD colleagues for their support throughout this project.

1 Introduction

The context

The world of work is increasingly complex and evolving all the time. Major trends – including an ageing population, alternative employment models and increasing use of technology – are creating demand for new approaches to people management. The people profession must do more than simply respond to these challenges: it has the power to actively drive positive change in the world of work.

‘The people profession has the power to actively drive positive change in the world of work.’

What is the people profession?

We have moved away from referring to ‘professionals working in HR and L&D’ to talking about ‘people professionals’, to reflect the wide range of specialisms that now make up our profession – encompassing HR, learning and development, organisational development and organisational change.

Professionalism in HR, and related disciplines, is more important than ever. Given the numerous corporate scandals related to business malpractice and poor treatment of workers, there are now calls for people professionals to create cultures of transparency and trust by advising organisations on the people implications of business decisions (Parkes and Davis 2013, CIPD 2016a). There’s also increasing recognition of the need to develop more sustainable organisational practices, which deliver long-term value not only in terms of profit, but for a range of stakeholders including people and wider society (CIPD 2017). To step up to these challenges, and really make an impact, people professionals need to be trusted as credible experts and to demonstrate strong standards of integrity when advising organisational leaders (Khurana et al 2004, CIPD 2017).

However, a number of factors may put people management practitioners’ professional status at risk. First, as line managers become better educated in HRM practices, people professionals need to carve out a new, unique role in organisations (Farndale and Brewster 2005). Second, technology is enabling the standardisation of and access to information, which can undermine some of the control and unique insights people practitioners previously held.

‘Striking a balance between organisational efficiency and social responsibility is core to the unique role of people professionals, which is distinct from other management roles where the emphasis is on enhancing economic value.’

This presents a critical opportunity for people practitioners to re-imagine their professional responsibilities. While earlier strategic HRM models focused on delivering economic value and neglected employee and societal well-being (Beer et al 2015), more recent models acknowledge multiple stakeholders and define performance in terms of creating long-term value not only for financial stakeholders, but also for employees, customers and wider society. Striking a balance between organisational efficiency and

social responsibility is core to the unique role of people professionals, which is distinct from other management roles where the emphasis is on enhancing economic value (Budd 2004).

Gap between ambition and practice

Like many professions, HR faces inherent tensions in managing the conflicting needs and interests of different stakeholder groups (that is, the organisation and its people) (Caldwell 2003). The CIPD's (2015a) research suggests that, despite people professionals' ambition to make more ethical people management decisions, there's a significant gap between that ambition and practice. This could be explained, to some extent, by a lack of personal confidence on the part of practitioners, which the current survey findings show. People professionals may also be reluctant to challenge unethical behaviour in the organisation, or change existing processes and practices, because of lack of power or influence in the business (Parkes and Davis 2013).

Ethical tensions within organisations

Competing tensions within the organisation can be another barrier to fulfilling an 'ethical stewardship' role (Parkes and Davis 2013). The organisational climate may encourage the prioritisation of outcomes that make it difficult to uphold ethical values, and practices with a moral component, such as those designed to promote workers' quality of life rather than organisational goals, can be difficult to implement if they have no clear link to business performance (Guest and Woodrow 2012). Other factors, such as level of organisational commitment and perceptions of rewarded behaviours (Umphress et al 2010), could also influence practitioners' willingness and ability to demonstrate ethical practice.

The people profession can offer a unique contribution to organisations. By understanding, communicating and unlocking the value of the workforce, it can enable business outcomes that are sustainable and benefit everyone. The question is whether people professionals have shifted towards this mindset and have a broader sense of purpose in their work, or whether they are focused on driving short-term organisational performance.

'By understanding, communicating and unlocking the value of the workforce, the people profession can enable business outcomes that are sustainable and benefit everyone.'

The factors that affect that mindset and associated behaviours also need further exploration: there's a lack of robust data about people professionals' ability to uphold professional standards, including ethical competence. Moreover, there is currently a lack of evidence on how these factors might be linked to career development and progression.

This research begins to plug these gaps by considering what helps people professionals in the UK and Ireland achieve different aspects of career success and professional practice.

Methodology

The CIPD, in collaboration with the European Association for People Management (EAPM), the Institute for Human Resource Professionals (IHRP) in Singapore and the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), has developed a survey to take a bi-annual snapshot of the state of the people profession. In this study, we explore the following questions:

- 1 What factors are associated with career success in the people profession?
- 2 What factors are associated with practitioners' ability to demonstrate professional behaviour?
- 3 Are there any links between professional behaviour and career success?

We conducted an online survey of people professionals between 28 March and 8 June 2018. The sample included a mix of seniority levels and professional body members. In total, there were 974 respondents in the UK and Ireland. The online survey was distributed by YouGov, and the sample was extended with respondents from across our networks and those of our partners.

The sample characteristics are shown in the appendix. Because of a low number of respondents in Ireland, the UK and Ireland samples have been grouped together for the purpose of the report.

Throughout the report we highlight interesting differences between sectors, organisation sizes and seniority levels, where these are significantly greater than could be expected by chance ($p < 0.05$). The descriptive data analysis was conducted by YouGov, with further analysis conducted by the CIPD.

Dimensions of career success

In the literature, career success is divided into extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions (Ballout 2007). Extrinsic factors represent the objective component of career success, that is, observable accomplishments or outcomes including pay and promotions. There is a strong subjective aspect to career success, since what constitutes success for one individual, or someone at a particular point in their career, may look different for another at a different career stage. The intrinsic – or subjective – component refers to individuals' feelings about their careers and progression, and can be assessed in terms of psychological success such as career satisfaction and happiness in work.

The objective and subjective measures of career success used in the survey are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Measures of career success

Objective (extrinsic) success measures	Subjective (intrinsic) success measures
Annual salary	Career satisfaction
Number of promotions	Perceived likelihood of promotion
	Meaningfulness of work

2 Careers

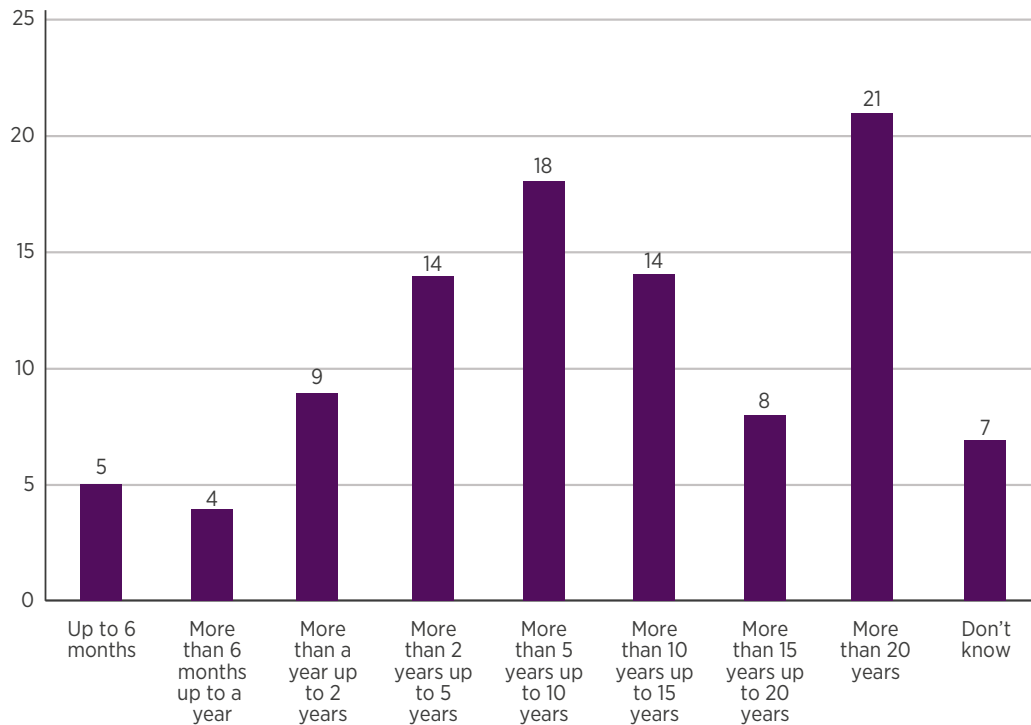
The majority of people professionals have experience of working in other fields

We first examined people professionals' career backgrounds and routes into the profession, in order to explore whether particular pathways are linked with higher or lower levels of career success.

The majority of practitioners (84%) surveyed had more than a year's experience outside the people profession (Figure 1). This is an increase since similar research in 2012, when

75% of HR professionals in the CIPD's *HR Outlook* survey said they had experience of working in other functions. This suggests that more practitioners are now moving into the people profession from other areas. With such diverse career paths, the profession is likely to be benefiting from a wealth of skills and experience brought in from other business areas. As organisations face unprecedented people management challenges driven by major external trends such as automation, which require innovative solutions (CIPD 2015a), this breadth of experience will prove particularly beneficial.

Figure 1: Number of years' work experience outside the people profession (%)



Base: n=974

Nearly two in five practitioners feel over-skilled for the requirements of their role

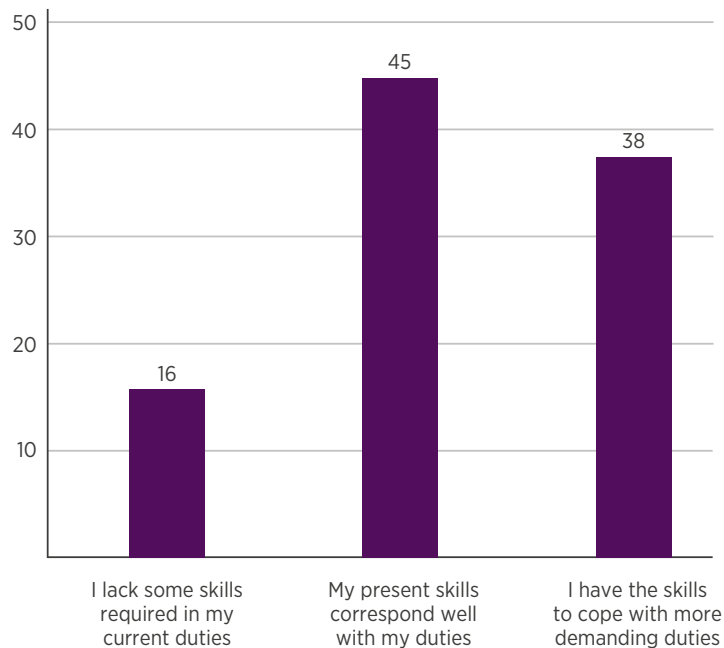
The extent to which individuals' skills match their job role can influence their chances of progression. 'Person-job fit' (the alignment between an individual's abilities and the demands of their job) has been linked to career satisfaction and success (Ballout 2007).

Our survey revealed that 45% of practitioners feel their skills match the requirements of their job, but nearly two in five (38%) feel that they are somewhat over-skilled (Figure 2). People professionals are often overburdened with administrative work, particularly if the organisation lacks admin resource, which impacts on their capacity to focus on more strategic activities. However, it's important to remember that so-called transactional services such as recruitment, training and advising on employment law (Armstrong and Taylor 2014) are critical to organisation success too.

People professionals who work in an SME are more likely than those who work in a large organisation to believe their skills correspond well with their duties (51% and 40% respectively). Moreover, practitioners in large organisations are more likely than those in SMEs to feel they have the skills to cope with more demanding duties than their role requires (45% and 31% respectively). This could be because there is more scope to take on challenging tasks that go beyond the job description in smaller companies, whereas large organisations may be more hierarchical and less flexible.

A fifth (22%) of practitioners with less than five years of experience in the profession reported that they lack some skills required in their current duties. This highlights the need for greater investment in training and development for individuals who are at an earlier stage in their career. We also found that digital working, analytics and business acumen were key capability areas where practitioners feel least confident.

Figure 2: Skills level (%)



Base: n=974

These findings are similar to the CIPD’s latest skills report, based on a survey of the wider working population. It found that 37% of UK employees feel over-skilled, while more than one in ten feel under-skilled, and only half say their skills are well matched to the level required by their job (CIPD 2018b). The *Employer skills survey 2017* (Winterbotham et al 2018) also suggested a general trend of under use of skills in the labour market, which shows that this is not unique to the people profession.

Levels of career success

Key findings

- The majority of people professionals have a strong sense of meaning in their work and believe that the profession offers a meaningful career.
- CIPD members are more likely than non-members to be promoted in organisations, and to have a high sense of meaning in their work.
- Personal confidence is a key barrier to career progression.

Objective aspects of career success

This section provides an overview of salaries and the number of promotions practitioners have received over their entire career.

In the UK, the most common annual salary bracket for practitioners in both SMEs and large organisations was £20,000–29,999 (Table 2).

Table 2: UK annual salary (including bonuses, before tax deductions), by organisation size

Annual salary	Organisation size	
	SME (2–249 employees) (%)	Large (250+ employees) (%)
Up to £19,999	17	6
£20,000–29,999	27	27
£30,000–39,999	23	25
£40,000–49,999	13	16
£50,000–69,999	10	12
£70,000–129,999	7	10
£130,000 and over	3	3

Base: n=784

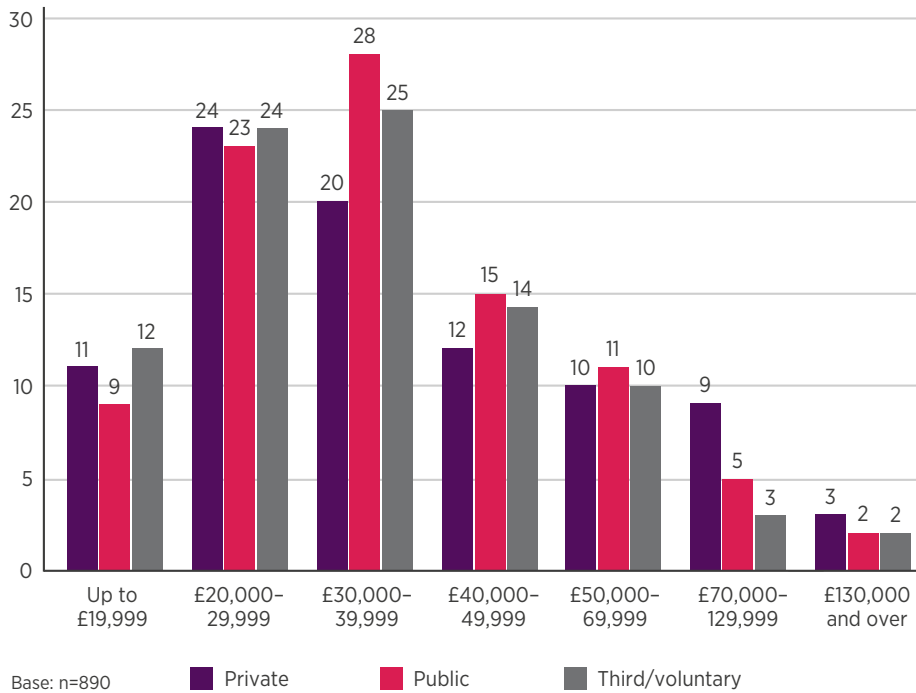
Table 3: UK annual salary (including bonuses, before tax deductions), by role level

Annual salary	Role level			
	High strategic (%)	Strategic delivery-focused (%)	Medium-term operational (%)	Day-to-day operational (%)
Up to £19,999	9	4	7	27
£20,000–29,999	9	20	33	40
£30,000–39,999	18	26	33	19
£40,000–49,999	17	19	13	8
£50,000–69,999	19	17	9	2
£70,000–129,999	18	11	4	4
£130,000 and over	10	2	1	1

Base: n=808

Around a quarter of UK practitioners in all sectors were in the £20,000–29,999 income bracket. A larger proportion of private sector practitioners earned £70,000–129,999, compared with those in the public and third sectors (9%, 5% and 3% respectively).

Figure 3: UK annual salary (including bonuses, before tax deductions), by sector (%)



In Ireland, the people professionals we surveyed were most commonly earning €70,000-99,999, but this was based on a small sample.

Table 4: Ireland annual salary (including bonuses, before tax deductions)

Annual salary	%
Up to €29,999	6
€30,000-39,999	13
€40,000-49,999	15
€50,000-69,999	22
€70,000-99,999	27
€100,000 and over	11

Base: n=75

Organisational culture can influence promotion opportunities

We asked respondents how many promotions they have received over the course of their career. Three to five promotions was the most common response (37%), with a quarter (25%) reporting one to two promotions and 16% saying six to nine. The data showed that this is influenced by organisational culture, CIPD membership and gender:

- Practitioners who work in an organisation with a dynamic, entrepreneurial and creative culture were more likely to have had ten or more promotions over the course of their career than those who work in a culture that is formalised and structured (15% compared with 5%).
- CIPD members were more likely to have had three or more promotions over the course of their career (69%), compared with non-members (56%).
- Men were more likely to report that they have had ten or more promotions (12%) than women (6%).

Subjective aspects of career success

Hopes of promotion are generally low

The majority of respondents (65%) felt it was not likely that they would be promoted within their current organisation in the next three years (compared with 35% who thought it was likely). This differed by organisation size and sector: practitioners working in SMEs were more likely to think they had a low chance of promotion (72%) than those in large organisations (57%). This can be expected since large organisations tend to have more hierarchical systems and internal promotional practices, and so are more likely to facilitate career mobility (Ballout 2007).

CIPD members were more likely than non-members to think a promotion is likely (44% compared with 29%). Alongside the earlier finding that CIPD members were more likely than non-members to have had at least three promotions, this suggests that being a member of the CIPD increases people professionals' ability to advance in their careers. This could be because of an increase in skills and confidence that comes with the accreditation, as well as organisations' recognition of its value. Other research has found that HR practitioners believe a CIPD or other HR qualification is essential to achieving success in the profession (Carty 2017) and this has also been linked to improved salary (Ackah and Heaton 2003). Some work environments may value technical skills and on-the-job experience more than a professional qualification, but the ideal is a combination of the two.

'Being a member of the CIPD increases people professionals' ability to advance in their careers.'

Practitioners working in the private and public sectors were also more likely to believe they would be promoted than those in the third/voluntary sector (37%, 37% and 23% respectively).

Most are satisfied with their career progression

The majority of respondents (66%) said that their career progression has met or exceeded their expectations. In contrast to the finding that those working in SMEs were more likely than those in large companies to believe a promotion was unlikely, we found that practitioners who work in large organisations were more likely than those who work in SMEs to feel their career progression has failed to meet their expectations (24% and 15% respectively). This could indicate different expectations within different sizes of organisation, with employees in large companies expecting to be able to progress more quickly.

The most commonly cited barriers to career advancement were lack of opportunities with current employer (19%) and personal confidence (18%). This was reflected in a poll of CIPD members in May 2018, which showed that over 55% of respondents were not confident that they know how to achieve their career goals. The profession's struggle with legitimacy in the eyes of its stakeholders (Kochan 2007) could play a part in this lack of confidence. It could also be that people professionals are often focused on developing other people, while neglecting to apply this to themselves. Thirteen per cent of respondents said that organisational politics were a barrier to progression, while a fifth (19%) said they don't feel there have been any barriers.

The majority say the people profession is a meaningful career

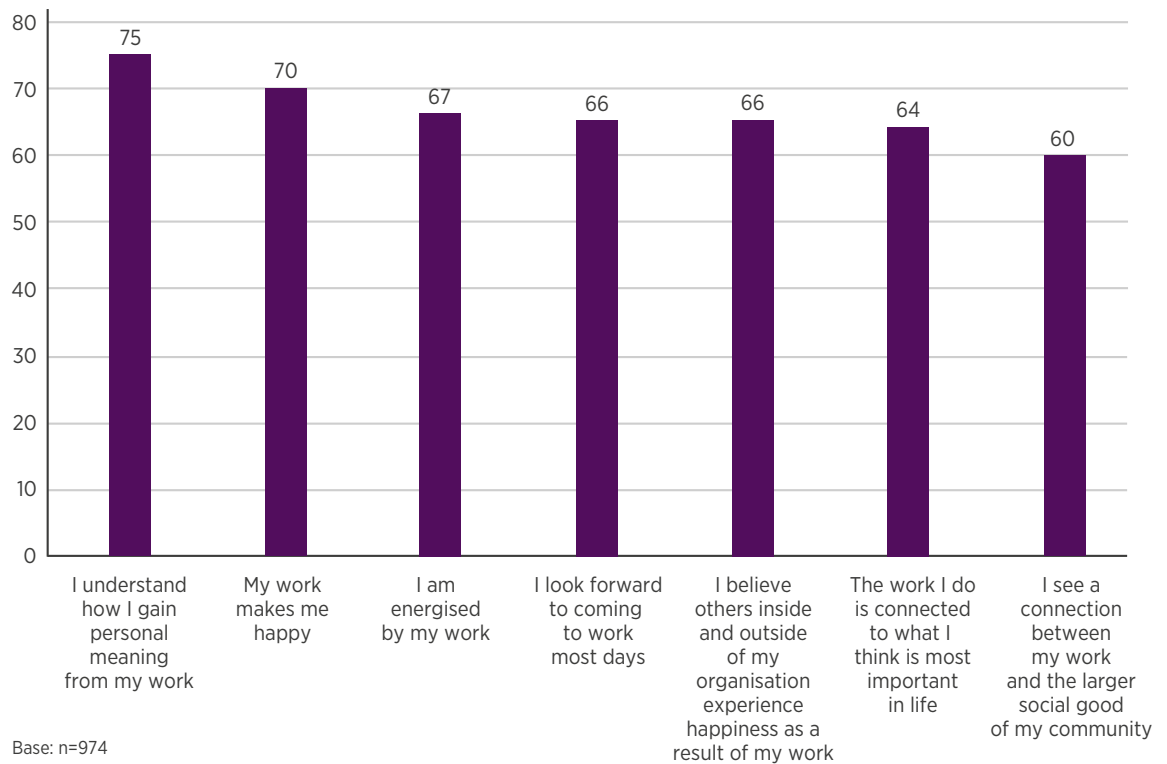
Overall, the data showed strong agreement with statements in our survey on work meaningfulness (Figure 4). In addition, nearly eight in ten (78%) respondents agreed that the profession offers a meaningful career, and 74% said it offers good career prospects (see appendix). While the majority of respondents had a very high score on work meaningfulness (91%) (see appendix), this differed by sector: private sector professionals were more likely to report a low score (11%) than those who work in the third/voluntary

sector (5%). CIPD members were also more likely than non-members to report a high score on meaningful work (94% compared with 89%).

Research has shown work meaningfulness to be more important to people than any other aspect of work, including pay, reward and promotions (Pratt and Ashforth 2003). We can compare the sense of meaning in work among people professionals with that of other employees in the UK. The CIPD's (2018c) survey earlier this year found that around half of workers feel they do work that is useful to society, which is one aspect of meaningful work. This suggests that people professionals have a stronger sense of connection between their work and societal benefit, compared with other workers – possibly because of the direct impact they have on individuals' working lives.

Practitioners with a low sense of meaning in their work were more likely to work at an operational level supporting day-to-day delivery (41%) than those who have a high level of meaningful work (26%). This can suggest that, to some extent, a sense of purpose and personal connection to work develops over the course of a career, possibly because individuals in the people profession are able to have more impact in their work at more senior levels. It could also be that meaningfulness is derived from seeing the 'bigger picture' through strategic practice.

Figure 4: Agreement with statements on work meaningfulness (%)



What factors contribute to career success?

Key findings

- Having both experience outside the profession and the right level of skills for the role requirements are linked to career progression.
- People professionals who are disappointed with their career advancement to date are more likely to feel over-skilled for their job.

Diverse experiences of work lead to better career progression

In this section we explore the factors associated with objective and subjective career success. Previous CIPD research (2015b) has shown that having experience outside of HR can help practitioners reach the top of the profession, and demonstrating business acumen is often cited as an important HR competency (Ulrich et al 2013).

There was a positive correlation between number of years' experience outside the profession and perceived likelihood of promotion.¹ This suggests that people who work in other areas before moving into people professional roles are more likely to feel that their career is progressing well, possibly because of the broader skills that they have developed.

Practitioners whose career progression had exceeded or met their expectations were more likely to feel they have the right skills for their role (52% and 46% respectively), compared with those who were disappointed with their progression (36%) (see Table 5). Those who said their progression to date had failed to meet their expectations, however, were more likely to feel over-skilled for their job (49%) than those whose career progression has met or exceeded their expectations (38% and 32% respectively). This highlights an important role for the CIPD to play in setting a clear direction for what people professionals at different levels should be aiming for in their role.

Table 5: Skills level, by satisfaction with career progression

Skills level	Career progression to date		
	Exceeded my expectations (n=189) (%)	Met my expectations (n=450) (%)	Failed to meet my expectations (n=191) (%)
I lack some skills required	16	15	14
My present skills correspond well with my duties	52	46	36
I have the skills to cope with more demanding duties	32	38	49

Base: n=974

Perceiving one's work to be meaningful is also linked to satisfaction with progression. Those with a high meaningful work score were more likely to feel their progression has exceeded their expectations than those with a low meaningful work score (21% and 6% respectively). Likewise, those with a low sense of meaningful work were more likely to say their progression had failed to meet expectations (38%) than those with a high sense of meaningful work (18%). However, only 9% of respondents scored low on meaningfulness of work, so these are not strong findings.

3 Professional practice

This section of the report explores professional practice and the factors that are associated with practitioners' ability to demonstrate high standards of professionalism. These factors are outlined in a model we have developed based on our previous research (CIPD 2015a, 2017) and key areas of the new Profession Map (see Figure 5). Body of knowledge is of course a fundamental element of professional practice, but we did not include it in the survey because it can be difficult to measure.

Figure 5: Theoretical model for factors influencing ability to champion professionalism



People professionals and organisations view the employment relationship differently

Key findings

- People professionals have strong values regarding how employees should be treated in the organisation.
- Organisations do not prioritise employee needs to the same extent, which creates a tension in people professionals’ role. Building the confidence to apply strong professional judgement in order to successfully balance the interests of the organisation with those of its people should be a critical area of focus for the profession and the CIPD.

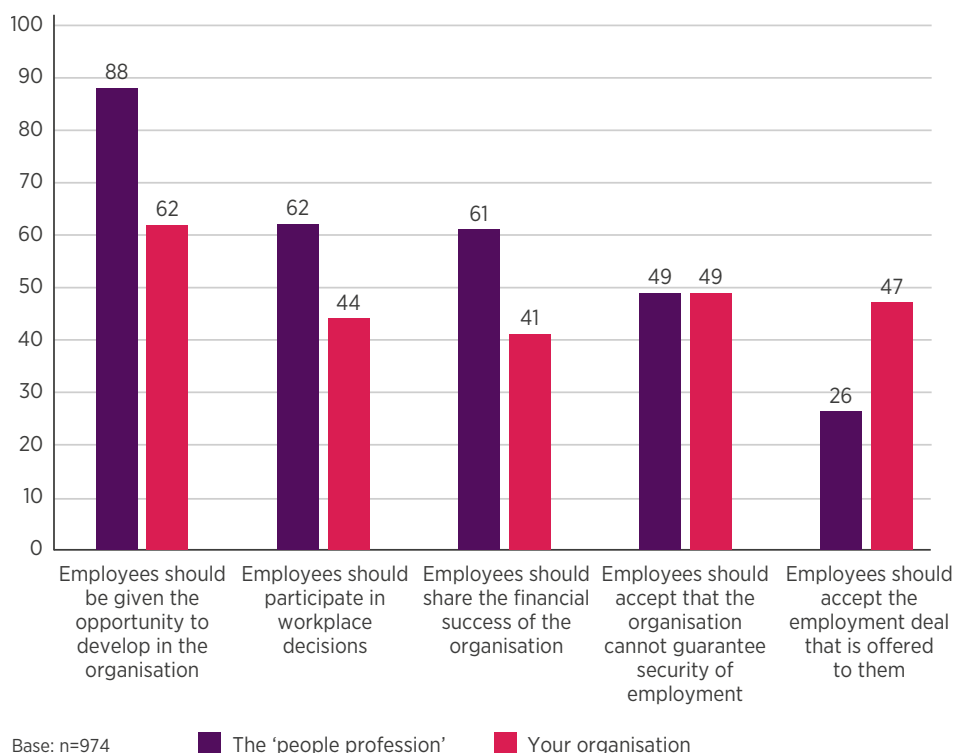
Our findings suggest that today’s profession generally has strong values regarding how people should be treated, but they may face difficulty in upholding those values if organisations do not prioritise employees to the same extent. Previous research has shown that competing tensions in the organisation can act as a barrier to HR’s ability to uphold strong ethical values (Parkes and Davis 2013). Moreover, organisational values may take precedence over professional values in influencing people practitioners (Farndale and Brewster 2005). Previous CIPD research (2017) showed that people professionals have a slightly stronger sense of identification with their organisation than with the profession, suggesting that when faced with a conflict of interest between their professional values and what the organisation expects them to do, they may feel obliged to prioritise the business needs. In any profession, it’s inevitable that practitioners will have to deal with conflicting stakeholder needs (Wooten 2001); and it’s the ability to apply professional judgement and demonstrate moral integrity that sets them apart as professionals (Khurana et al 2004).

To understand what factors are associated with practitioners’ ability to demonstrate professional behaviour, we first asked questions about their professional values and their organisation’s values, in terms of their perspective on employees.

Our survey revealed a mismatch between how people professionals believe employees should be treated, and how their organisations view employees² (Figure 6). For example, 88% agreed with the statement, ‘Employees should be given the opportunity to develop in the organisation’, whereas only 62% said this statement reflects the values of their

organisation. In a previous CIPD survey of UK HR practitioners (2016b), we found that 18% said the statement ‘Employees participate in workplace decisions’ did not apply in their organisation, and 42% said the same about the statement, ‘Employees share the financial success of the company’. This reflects a sentiment among people professionals that their organisations tend to view the employment relationship in transactional terms, rather than as a partnership model (Guest 2002).

Figure 6: Statements describing the values of the profession vs those of the organisation (%)



Balancing the interests of the organisation and its employees has been a consistent tension in HR for some time (Boselie et al 2009). In striving to be a strategic partner to the business in the context of increasing economic pressure, the profession has been criticised by some for deprioritising the interests of employees (Marchington 2008), while others have argued that HR should not act as the ‘ethical conscience’ of the business (Jeffery 2014), but rather play the role of facilitator in creating ethical cultures. Our research suggests that many business leaders are still prioritising business outcomes over employee engagement and development, instead of recognising that these factors are mutually reinforcing.

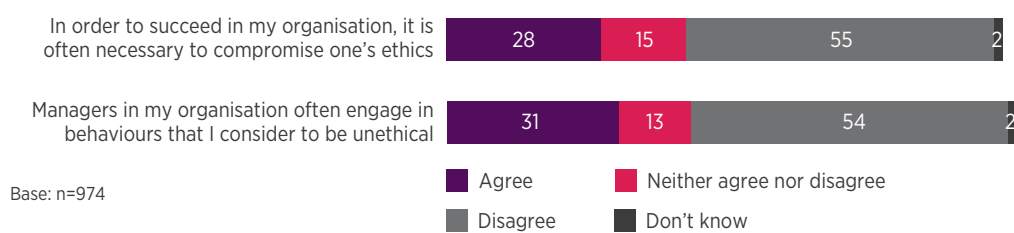
Organisations play a role in shaping the ethical behaviour of employees

Key findings

- Three in ten (31%) people professionals said managers in their organisation often demonstrate unethical behaviour.
- More than six in ten (64%) believe their job gives them the opportunity to fully express themselves as a professional.
- Almost three in ten (28%) feel that there’s a conflict between what their organisation expects of them and their professional beliefs, and this is most prominent in the public sector.

According to Newman and colleagues (2017, p475), ‘Ethical climates develop as a result of organisational policies, practices, and leadership, and exert significant influence on the ethical decision making of organisational members and their subsequent attitudes and behaviour at work.’ We found that three in ten practitioners (31%) felt that their managers often demonstrate unethical behaviour, and nearly the same proportion (28%) felt that it’s often necessary to compromise ethical values in their company³ (Figure 7). Practitioners who work in SMEs were more likely than those working in large organisations to disagree that in order to succeed in their organisation, it’s often necessary to compromise ethics (62% and 49% respectively) and to disagree that managers often engage in unethical behaviours (62% and 46% respectively). There may be higher levels of trust in smaller organisations, which discourages employees from engaging in malpractice.

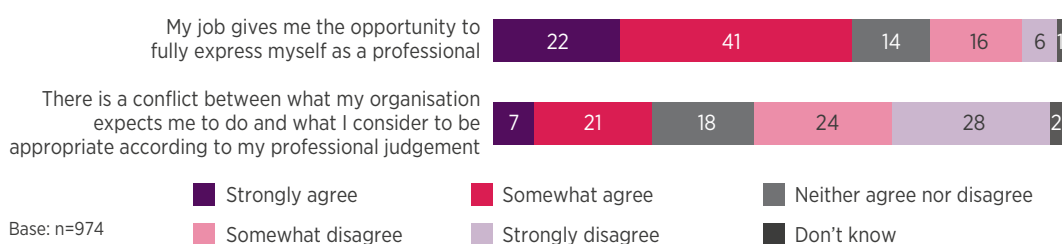
Figure 7: Percentage of respondents who agreed with statements examining ethical climate (%)



In addition to considering the ethical climate, we explored the extent to which practitioners feel able to exercise their professional judgement in their role. More than six in ten (64%) agreed that their job gives them the opportunity to fully express themselves as a professional, whereas nearly three in ten (28%) said there’s a conflict between what their organisation expects of them and their professional beliefs (Figure 8). It is positive to see that the majority of practitioners feel confident to express their professional voice at work, but there is still room for improvement. The conflict experienced by some practitioners between their organisational and professional interests mirrors the mismatch in values shown in our earlier findings, and highlights an important role for the CIPD to support people professionals in these situations. We also found that:

- Practitioners who work in an entrepreneurial and creative culture (76%) and those who work in an organisation with a family feel (73%) were more likely to feel their job gives them opportunity to express themselves professionally than those working in a results-oriented (58%) or formalised/structured organisation (54%).
- Practitioners working in the public sector (36%) were more likely to agree that there’s a conflict between what their organisation expects and their professional judgement than those in the private (27%) or third/voluntary sector (25%). This could be due to public sector pressures to cut costs.

Figure 8: Ability to apply professional judgement (%)



The positive finding that 64% of practitioners feel able to fully express themselves as a professional reflects previous CIPD research (2017) that the majority of practitioners feel empowered to challenge organisational decisions. However, our 2017 research also suggested that HR professionals do not necessarily act on their intention to challenge organisational decisions, possibly because they feel a stronger sense of identity and affiliation with their organisation than with their profession.

Creating economic value and contributing to individual well-being are equally important

Key findings

- Contributing to the bottom line and the well-being of employees are viewed as equally important outcomes in the role of people professionals.
- Senior practitioners tend to be more focused on business outcomes, and so need support in maintaining employee well-being as a priority.
- People professionals' performance is most likely to be evaluated based on their contribution to the bottom line, as opposed to employee well-being.

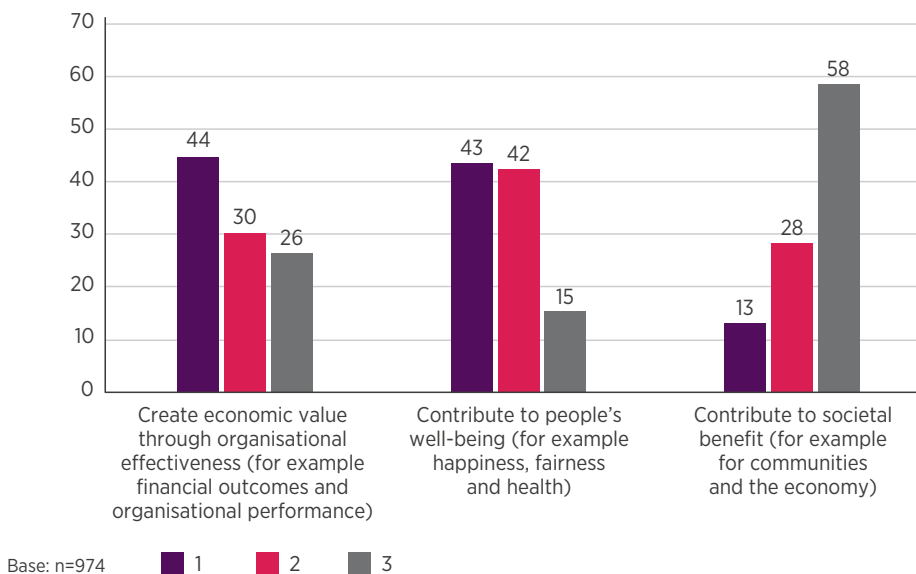
To understand how practitioners prioritise different stakeholder outcomes, we first asked them to rank three outcomes⁴ in order of what they believed to be the most important indicators of their own performance (Figure 9). The same proportions of practitioners ranked creating economic value and contributing to people's well-being as the most important outcome in their role (44% and 43% respectively), whereas only 13% said that delivering societal outcomes was the most important. This suggests that people professionals feel equally geared towards delivering value for the business and for workers. Previous studies have shown that improving employee well-being can have a positive impact on business performance, by lowering absence and turnover costs (Baptiste 2008).

'People professionals feel equally geared towards delivering value for the business and for workers.'

As expected, practitioners who work in the third/voluntary sector (28%) and public sector (20%) were more likely to consider contributing to social value as an important indicator of their performance than those in the private sector (8%). Perhaps this is because societal benefit is less measurable in private sector organisational contexts. Furthermore, practitioners working in a results-oriented organisational culture were most likely to report that creating economic value is the most important measure of their performance (56%).

Those who work at lower seniority levels were more likely to say that contributing to people's well-being was the most important outcome for them (53% of those who work operationally to deliver short- to medium-term value, and 49% of those who work at a day-to-day operational level) than practitioners who work at more senior strategic levels (29% of those who deliver long-term strategic value and 37% of those who are in a delivery-focused strategic position). This is likely to be due to the scope of the role: since well-being is more commonly part of the day-to-day role for those at lower seniority levels, they may have more influence over and motivation for this outcome compared with the more economically focused decisions that senior practitioners tend to make. Senior practitioners' personal objectives may be more closely linked to contributing to the bottom line than other practitioners, but it's important that they maintain well-being as a priority and set the tone from the top. Our research suggests they may benefit from some support in achieving the right balance.

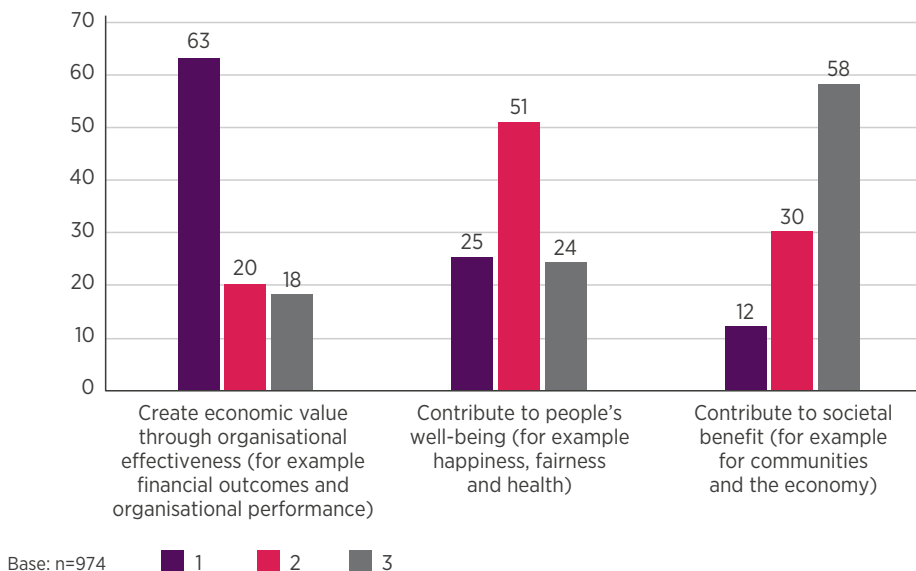
Figure 9: Rankings in order of importance as an indicator of own performance (%)



We then asked respondents to rank the same outcomes in order of importance for how their performance is evaluated in their organisation (Figure 10). While two in five said that contributing to people’s well-being is the most important indicator of their own performance, only one in four said their performance is primarily evaluated by this. This is similar to the earlier reported mismatch between practitioners’ professional and organisational values on how employees should be treated – again pointing to the tensions that practitioners need to navigate in their role.

People professionals who work at a strategic level were more likely to say that creating economic value is the most important factor for how their performance is evaluated (50% of those who deliver long-term strategic value and 49% of those who are in a delivery-focused strategic position) compared with those who work at an operational level delivering short- to medium-term value (36%). Again, there is potentially a tension around organisations prioritising economic value and holding senior practitioners to account for this, rather than implementing a balance of measures including individual well-being and wider societal benefit.

Figure 10: Rankings in order of importance for how own performance is evaluated in organisation (%)



Many practitioners feel their department lacks influence in the workplace

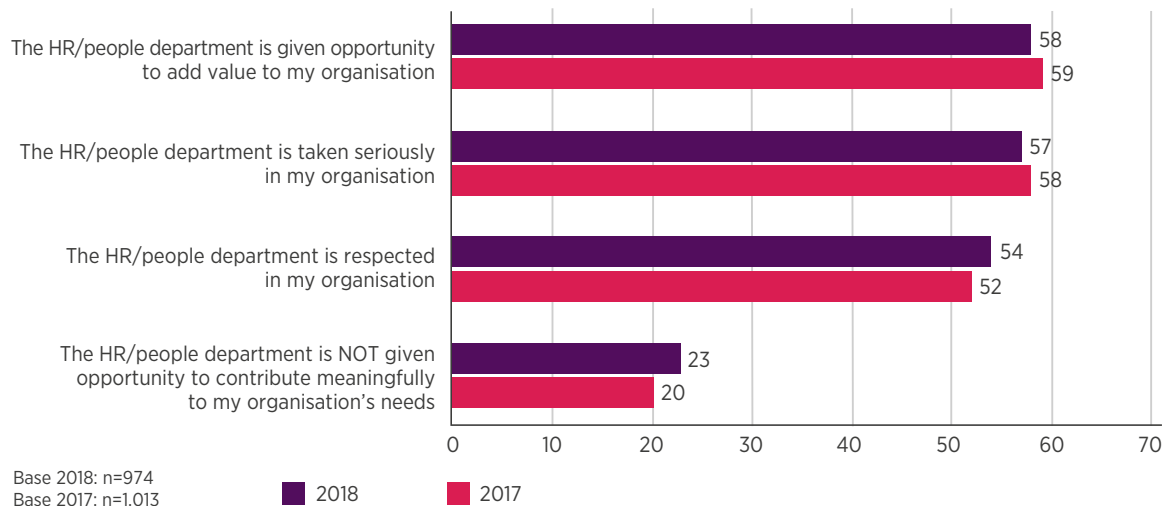
Key findings

- Nearly half of people professionals don't believe their team or department has credibility in the organisation. This credibility can be developed through practitioners' demonstration of strong standards of professionalism.
- One in five (23%) respondents feel their team or department does not have the opportunity to demonstrate a meaningful contribution to the organisation. This could have a negative impact on their confidence and ability to challenge the organisation when ethical values are potentially being compromised.

The level of influence that the people department has in an organisation may influence their ability to uphold strong ethical standards (Parkes and Davis 2013, Guest and Woodrow 2012). We asked the respondents a set of questions about how their team or department is perceived in the organisation, to explore whether this has any impact on their ability to demonstrate professional behaviour. Over half of practitioners indicated that their team or department is respected (54%), taken seriously (57%) and given opportunity to add value in the organisation (58%). However, just over one in five (23%) said they are not given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their organisation's needs. This differed by seniority level, with practitioners in high strategic positions more likely than those at a low operational level to report that they are given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully (55% of those who work at a strategic level to deliver long-term value, and 44% of those who deliver day-to-day operational support).

These findings are very similar to those of the CIPD's 2017 research (see Figure 11). The perceived level of credibility and influence of the people function could come down to how cohesive they are as a team, and the consistency of the advice and communication they give to the organisation as a department. The people director also plays a critical role in building the overall credibility of the team; if they do not lead with strong values and influence the executive team to understand and support the people agenda, the team's credibility will suffer.

Figure 11: Comparison of 2017 and 2018 findings on perceived influence of people department in organisation (%)



We found that practitioners who work at a high strategic level (64%) were more likely to agree that the people department is respected in their organisation than those working at a lower strategic level (53%) or operational levels (53% of those who work operationally to deliver short- to medium-term value and 49% of those who work at a day-to-day operational level). However, this is based on a subjective view, and workers at a lower level may be more in touch with the feelings ‘on the shop floor’. CIPD members were also more likely than non-members to agree that the people department is given an opportunity to add value in their organisation (65% and 54% respectively). This suggests that more respect is earned with the accreditation of professional body membership.

Professional courage is on the up

Key findings

- Two in five (41%) practitioners have raised an ethical issue with a manager in the past year, and this has increased by ten percentage points since our 2017 research.
- Few people professionals have actually gone against managers’ unethical decisions, which is a key area for the profession and the CIPD to develop, particularly in the context of widespread business malpractice.

Our findings showed that 44% of respondents said that they had regularly challenged the purpose of what they were asked to do and proposed alternative ways in which they could contribute. This suggests that they are proactively introducing different approaches in their work, which can improve organisational effectiveness when applied in the right circumstances (Armstrong and Taylor 2014). CIPD members were more likely than non-members to report this (56% compared with 37%), which is likely to be because of their professional confidence.

On the other hand, almost two in five (39%) people professionals have often or always accepted the tasks they were given over the past year because they felt they had to. As we would expect, this was much more likely amongst less experienced practitioners: 51% of those with less than five years’ experience in the profession said they had regularly accepted tasks given, compared with 41% of those with 6–15 years’ experience and 30% with 16 or more years’ experience.

‘Two in five practitioners (41%) said they had raised an ethical issue with a manager.’

Professional courage is described as an attribute that motivates and enables individuals to take the right course of action, based on their professional ethics (Sekerka et al 2009). Previous CIPD research (2015a) showed that people professionals tend to have the desire to make ethical decisions, but often lack the courage to challenge the organisation. Legge (1978) suggested that gaining influence in the organisation could help practitioners to overcome conflicts of interest between their ethical values and organisational demands. This could be achieved either through alignment with the organisation’s system and values, or by challenging the status quo and introducing new approaches (Guest and King 2004). The ability to demonstrate high levels of autonomy and apply some independence of judgement are key aspects of professionalism (Armstrong and Taylor 2014). Promisingly, two in five practitioners (41%) said they had raised an ethical issue with a manager, although only 13% have gone against managers’ decisions if they violated ethical standards. This indicates a gap between speaking up to management and taking action against managers’ unethical behaviour, which is a critical area of challenge for the profession. There was a moderate

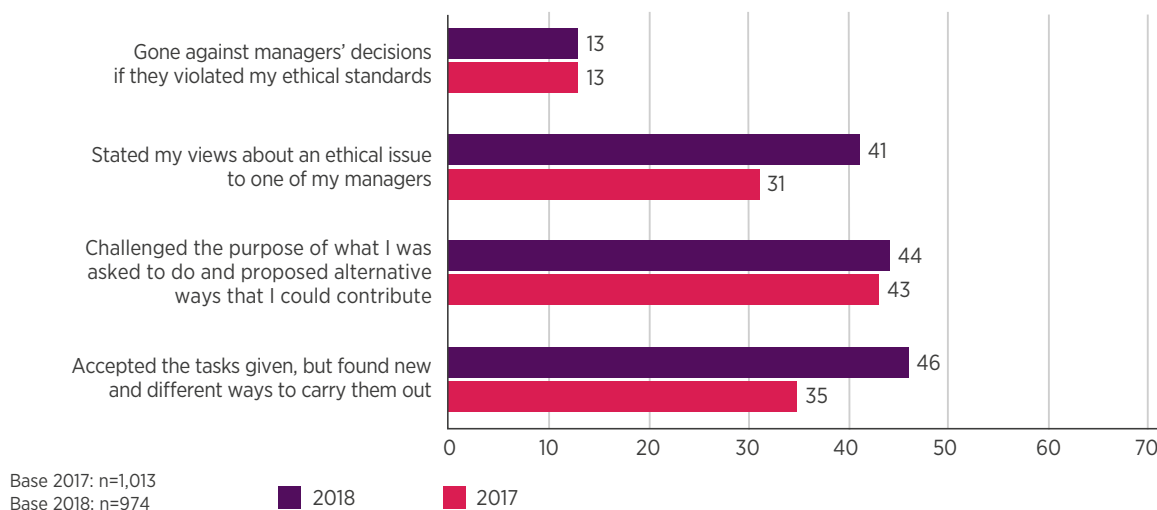
positive correlation between stating views about an ethical issue to a manager and going against managers' unethical decisions.⁵ Therefore, the more practitioners discuss their concerns about ethics, the more likely they are to challenge malpractice.

The findings also indicated that:

- People professionals working in large organisations were more likely to say they had often stated their views about an ethical issue (30%), compared with those working in SMEs (22%). SMEs often have a family feel, which can make it more difficult to raise concerns.
- CIPD members were more likely than non-members to say they had always or often spoken up about an ethical issue (57% and 32% respectively).

We compared these findings with our 2017 survey responses (see Figure 12), which shows that speaking up about ethical issues has increased by 10 percentage points. This indicates growing confidence around ethics, possibly as a result of the heightened awareness of ethical issues more broadly in the external business environment.

Figure 12: Ethical issues of behaviour over last 12 months (%)



Use of data is an Achilles' heel for people professionals

Key findings

- Over half (55%) of people professionals use organisational data in their decision-making, and this is more common among CIPD members. Skills in data analytics are critical for improving transparency within organisations, and this is an area requiring further investment.
- Data-driven practitioners are more likely to feel able to fully express themselves professionally at work, and to find new ways of doing things.

Overall, it is positive to see that the majority of people professionals in the survey indicated that they use a wide variety of sources in their decision-making. Our findings showed that personal experience is the top decision-making factor for practitioners, followed by organisational data and intuition (Figure 13). To improve the quality of decision-making, practitioners must draw on the best available evidence from multiple sources. According to the Centre for Evidence-Based Management (CEBMA) (Barends et al 2014), sources of evidence that should be considered include:

- scientific research
- organisational data
- professional experience and judgement
- the values and concerns of stakeholders involved.

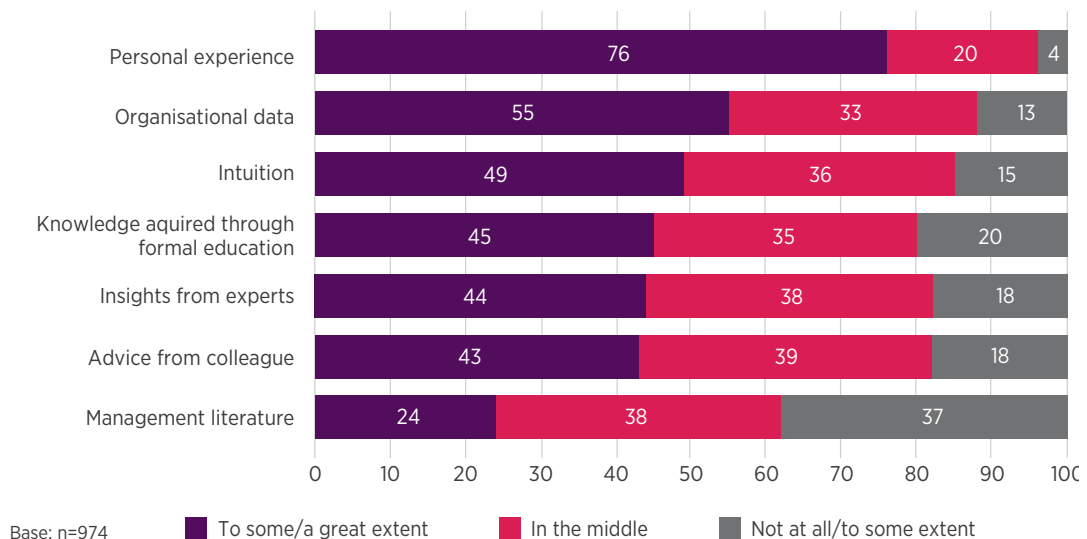
The professionalism of people practitioners comes into play by interpreting different types of evidence, and actively using it to inform clear recommendations for key stakeholders, while driving more evidence-based people practice.

‘CIPD members (64%) were more likely than non-members (49%) to base decisions on organisational data.’

We found that the more experienced a practitioner is, the more they rely on personal experience to make decisions – with 84% of those with 16 or more years’ experience stating this, compared with 69% of those with up to five years’ experience. While it is intuitive that the more experienced practitioners become, the more they trust their personal judgement, it’s important to understand the role of bias and to evaluate other sources of evidence in addition, rather than ‘cherry-picking’ evidence that supports one’s viewpoint (CIPD 2016c). As Armstrong and Taylor (2014) suggested, *‘an approach based on systematic questioning, analysis and diagnosis to get at the facts and establish the issues involved is more likely to produce a reasonably satisfactory outcome than one relying purely on “gut feeling”’* (p101).

CIPD members (64%) were more likely than non-members (49%) to base decisions on organisational data. One part of organisational data that is considered to be important in evidence-based practice is workforce data (CIPD 2018a). Incorporating this into practice through the use of HR analytics can provide insights into how workplace performance and productivity can be improved, while creating a positive experience of work for people. Analytical skills are therefore becoming increasingly important to help organisations understand their workforce better, but this is an area that needs more investment. The CIPD’s recent *People Analytics* survey (2018a) found that only 40% of global respondents believe their HR function is able to use data to solve business problems. However, there is untapped potential in UK people professionals, with some feeling confident with advanced analytics techniques but only a small minority using these in their day-to-day role (CIPD 2018a).

Figure 13: Sources of evidence used in decision-making (%)



There were small positive correlations between use of organisational data and ability to express oneself as a professional,⁶ accepting tasks given but finding alternative ways to carry them out,⁷ and challenging the purpose of tasks and proposing alternative ways of contributing.⁸ There was also a negative correlation between use of data and feeling obliged to do what is asked.⁹ This suggests that data-driven practitioners are likely to apply professional judgement with confidence, and demonstrate proactive behaviour through suggesting new solutions.

We also found that people professionals who have a strong sense of meaningful work were more likely to be data-driven in their decision-making than those with a low meaningful work score (57% and 32% respectively). Practitioners who feel that their department has a high level of credibility in the organisation were more likely to use organisational data than those who believe their department has low credibility (57% and 47% respectively).

Professional integrity aids career advancement

Key findings

- Having the opportunity to fully express oneself as a professional at work can boost practitioners' career satisfaction.
- Building people professionals' confidence to demonstrate strong professional judgement has the potential to positively impact individual practitioners in their career development, as well as organisations.

This section explores links between professional behaviour and achieving career success. Practitioners potentially face threats to their career advancement if they appear to deviate from business norms in an organisation that does not expect them to act as independent professionals (Parkes and Davis 2013, Guest and Woodrow 2012). Individuals in any role may also neglect ethical values if they believe they will be rewarded for doing so (Umpress et al 2010).

First, we found a positive correlation between the credibility of the people department in the organisation and practitioners' perceived likelihood of being promoted in the next three years.¹⁰ Those with a high department credibility score were also significantly more likely to agree that the profession offers a meaningful career (94%) than those with a low department credibility score (77%). Another study of HR professionals by XpertHR (Carty 2017) similarly found that over half (54%) identified the organisation's perception of HR as the most valuable organisational factor in advancing their career. Together, our findings suggest that the people team or department's status in the organisation influences practitioners' career opportunities.¹¹

We also found links between practitioners' perceived ability to use their professional judgement and subjective career success. Respondents who felt that their progression has exceeded their expectations were more likely to feel able to fully express themselves as a professional in their role (82%) than those who were less satisfied with their career progression (71% of those who said their progression had just met expectations, and 40% of those who had failed to meet expectations). Meanwhile, practitioners who said that they've failed to achieve their career goals were more likely to feel there's a conflict between the organisation's expectations and their professional judgement (40%) than those who were satisfied with their progression (27% of those who had met career expectations, and 24% of those who had exceeded expectations). This suggests that the more confident practitioners feel to do what they think is right as a professional, the more likely they are to be able to succeed in their careers. Practitioners who felt that their job

gives them the opportunity to fully express themselves as a professional were also more likely to have a high sense of meaningful work (68%).¹²

There was a weak positive correlation between challenging the purpose of tasks and proposing alternative solutions, and number of promotions.¹³ This suggests that people professionals are more likely to be promoted if they actively suggest other ways of doing things in the organisation. There was also a weak positive correlation between speaking up about an ethical issue to management and number of promotions.¹⁴ However, these findings could likely be explained by seniority level, since practitioners in more senior strategic roles were more likely than those at lower operational levels to have challenged the way things are done and raised ethical concerns, as well as to have received more promotions. Although these findings were not statistically strong, this is an important area that we should look into further, because it suggests a possible way for practitioners to be empowered to both demonstrate professional behaviour and advance in their careers.

4 Conclusion and recommendations

In this report we explored the current state of play of the people profession in terms of career journeys and professional practice. Overall, we find people professionals in a positive place: they report a very strong sense of meaning and purpose in their work, raise ethical concerns in the workplace and recognise the importance of using data to drive decision-making. People professionals appear to recognise the changing world of work, and are evolving their practice to meet its needs.

‘People professionals appear to recognise the changing world of work, and are evolving their practice to meet its needs.’

It’s important to note that the people profession is at a critical point in its evolution: practitioners can and should be taking the lead in helping organisations to find ways of creating sustainable organisational cultures for the long-term benefit of the organisation, their people and society. However, they may be limited in their ability to enact this role because of competing business demands and perceived threats to their career advancement. Balancing economic needs with social accountability requires a higher level of professional confidence and skills. There’s an important role for the CIPD to play in developing those skills and confidence: by setting a clear direction for what people professionals at different levels should be aiming for in their role, and supporting them to achieve that.

‘Balancing economic needs with social accountability requires a higher level of professional confidence and skills.’

In order to achieve effective and sustainable relationships between organisations and the people who work for them, people professionals need to be guided by strong principles but also base their decisions on the best available evidence (CIPD 2016c). Instead of blindly adopting the so-called ‘best practice’ of other organisations, which may not be appropriate in different organisational contexts, the CIPD encourages practitioners to think critically about the outcomes they need to achieve and the context they’re operating in before taking action.

Where next for the people profession?

In addition to the more specific recommendations made throughout the report, we suggest the following general recommendations for people professionals:

- **Invest in CPD:** People professionals should pursue opportunities to develop themselves by broadening skills within the profession and beyond. In addition to this they should look to develop their understanding of the key external trends impacting organisations, and use these insights to understand the implications for people management practice. These areas are shown to improve career prospects, professional confidence and professional competence.
- **Build confidence to challenge:** an important story to emerge from this study is that there is still some way to go before practitioners are fully confident in demonstrating professional courage at work and challenging current practices, processes and behaviours in their organisations. This is particularly true for professionals at lower seniority levels, and in public sector organisations and SMEs. Therefore, people professionals should look to develop their confidence through training, coaching and mentoring so as to be able to challenge decisions in the future. Our data shows that this would both promote ethical organisational practice and boost the career satisfaction of people professionals.
- **Be more evidence-based:** rapidly advancing workplace technology means there is increasing opportunity to seek out more information and data that can be used to improve decision-making. Professional judgement carries more weight when it's supported by strong evidence from diverse sources, so it's an important approach that the people profession should adopt, in order to operate more effectively in the modern world of work. People professionals should look to incorporate multiple sources of evidence into their decision-making and develop data analytics skills. This would help to improve decision-making and deliver more effective and sustainable people management solutions, while increasing the professional confidence and credibility of practitioners.

The new CIPD Profession Map

The world of work is complex and changing, and now more than ever, people professionals need a strong foundation for effective decision-making. The CIPD is supporting people professionals to thrive in this changing world of work – and fulfil the profession's shared purpose of championing better work and working lives – through a programme of work called Profession for the Future. The first milestone is the launch of the new Profession Map, designed to support values-based decision-making that is context-agnostic.

The new Profession Map defines the knowledge, behaviours and inherent values underpinning today's people profession. It is designed to help people professionals globally to make sound decisions and embrace change in the modern world of work. It sets out the defining purpose and values of our profession, together with the knowledge and behaviours required to put those values into practice.

It provides a clear basis for planning CPD and progression, as well as the tools to demonstrate the value and impact of the people profession to the wider business. It supports people professionals – whatever their background – to navigate situations confidently and successfully, drive change in their organisation and progress in their career.

The new CIPD ethics forum

The CIPD has been exploring the subject of ethics for the past year, which has included clarifying the role of the CIPD in business ethics and how to support members in practice. One way in which members have asked for support is to have a confidential space in which to share dilemmas with the member community and seek guidance from peers. In response, the CIPD has recently launched a new area of the Community section of the CIPD website. The area, known as 'Workplace Dilemmas: in confidence', enables members to reach out to their peers and start a discussion in a safe environment by posting a question anonymously.

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6 Appendix

Role-level descriptions

- **High strategic level:** Strategic level to deliver long-term value for organisations, working with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders to influence the way that organisations manage their people.
- **Strategic delivery-focused level:** Strategic overview, however, role is delivery-focused. Create medium- to long-term value for organisations and their people.
- **Medium-term operational level:** Work operationally to deliver short- to medium-term value for organisations and their people. Have influence with immediate colleagues and customers, although work is likely to impact a wider audience.
- **Day-to-day operational level:** Work operationally, supporting the day-to-day delivery of people plans, projects and solutions. Work is usually tactical, gathering information and delivering immediate outcomes for my manager, colleagues and immediate customers.

Measuring meaningfulness of work

We asked practitioners how strongly they agree with a set of statements adapted from Ashmos and Duchon's (2000) meaningful work scale, including 'My work makes me happy' and 'The work I do is connected to what I think is important in life'. We then calculated composite scores to compare practitioners who showed high versus low levels of meaningful work with other factors. The five-point scale was re-coded so that a low score represents an average of 1 to 2.49, and a high score represents an average of 2.5 to 5.

Demographics

UK/Ireland	
Age (%)	
18-34	37
35-44	27
45+	36
N	215

Gender (%)	
Male	35
Female	64
N	974

Organisation size (nationally) (%)	
2-249 employees	49
250+ employees	51
N	935

Sector (%)	
Private	67
Public	18
Third/voluntary	16
N	965

UK/Ireland

Years of experience in the people profession (%)

Up to 5 years	30
6-15 years	34
16+ years	35
N	945

Role level (%)

High strategic level	19
Strategic delivery-focused level	30
Medium-term operational level	24
Day-to-day operational level	27
N	974

Member of a professional body (%)

UK/Ireland	37
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Attitudes towards a career in the profession

	Net: Agree (%)
The profession is easy to get into	42
The profession offers good career prospects	74
The profession offers a meaningful career	78
The profession is a stepping stone into other business areas	52
The profession offers good earning potential	68

Skills level

Practitioners who work in the public sector were more likely to feel over-skilled in their roles (43%), compared with private (39%) or third (31%) sector practitioners.

Perceived likelihood of promotion

Respondents aged 18-34 were more likely to believe they have a strong likelihood of promotion (22%), compared with 35-44-year-olds (16%) and those aged 45 and over (5%).

Professional courage

The data showed that practitioners in high seniority positions were more likely to say they had always gone against managers' unethical decisions (10%) compared with those in lower levels of seniority (4% of those in delivery-focused and operational roles delivering short- to medium-term value, and 3% of those in day-to-day operational roles).

7 Endnotes

- ¹ $r = 0.20, p < 0.01$
- ² In the survey we adapted questions from Guest and Peccei's (2001) measure of people management practices.
- ³ To explore ethical climate in the organisation, we asked two questions adapted from Hunt et al's (1989) business ethics measure.
- ⁴ Based on Beer et al 2015.
- ⁵ $r = 0.47, p < 0.01$
- ⁶ $r_s = 0.12, p < 0.01$
- ⁷ $r_s = 0.07, p < 0.05$
- ⁸ $r_s = 0.06, p < 0.05$
- ⁹ $r_s = -0.08, p < 0.05$
- ¹⁰ $r_s = 0.13, p < 0.01$
- ¹¹ However, only 146 respondents showed a low score on their department's credibility, so this is not a conclusive finding.
- ¹² Although only a small number of respondents (87) had a low meaningful work score.
- ¹³ $r_s = 0.14, p < 0.01$
- ¹⁴ $r_s = 0.11, p < 0.01$



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Issued: November 2018 Reference: 7746 © CIPD 2018

